

Jesuit-Krauss-McCormick Library

BV652 .G178

Galpin, Charles Josiah

MAIN

Empty churches : the rural-urban dilemma



3 9967 00207 3695

By

CHARLES JOSIAH GALPIN



THE CENTURY CO.

New York and London

ACCESSION NUMBER

55168

SHELF NUMBER

BV 652

G 178

The Virginia Library

McCormick
Theological Seminary

of the

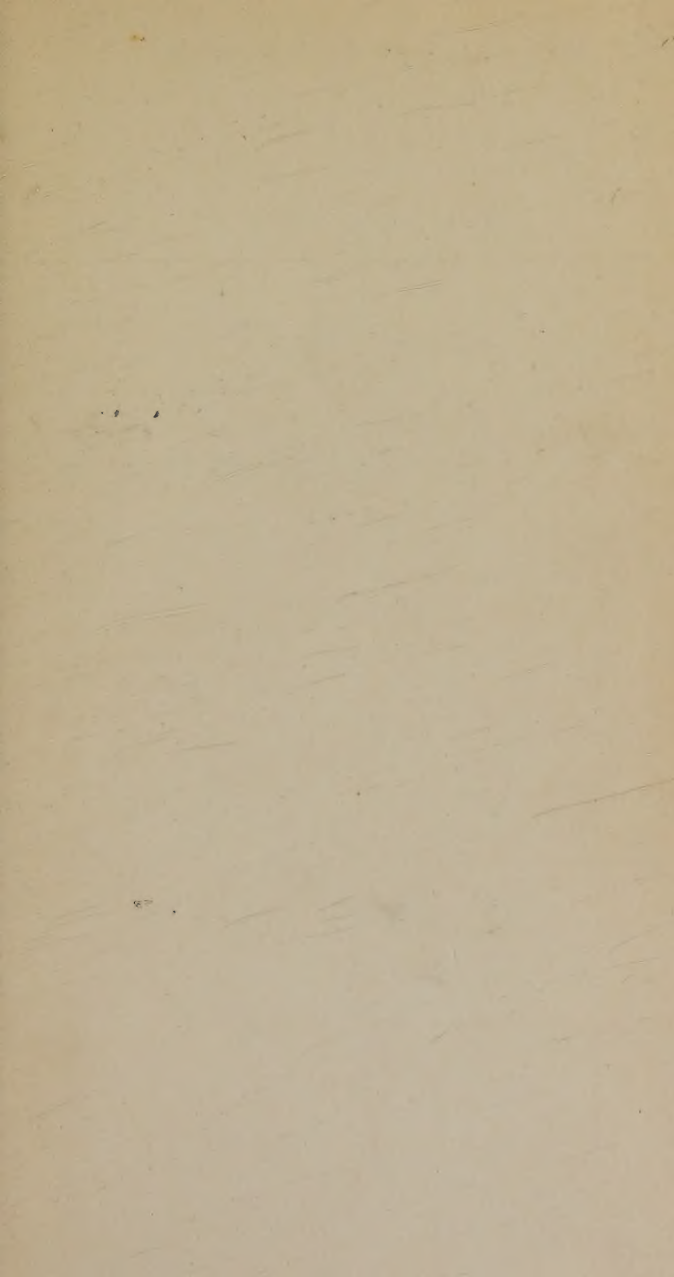
Presbyterian Church, Chicago

826 Belden Avenue

From _____

Received

SEP. 1925



EMPTY CHURCHES

By the Same Author

RURAL LIFE

RURAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS

EMPTY CHURCHES

THE RURAL-URBAN DILEMMA

BY

CHARLES JOSIAH GALPIN

IN CHARGE OF THE DIVISION OF FARM POPULATION AND RURAL LIFE,
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS,
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.



McCORMICK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY.

THE CENTURY CO.

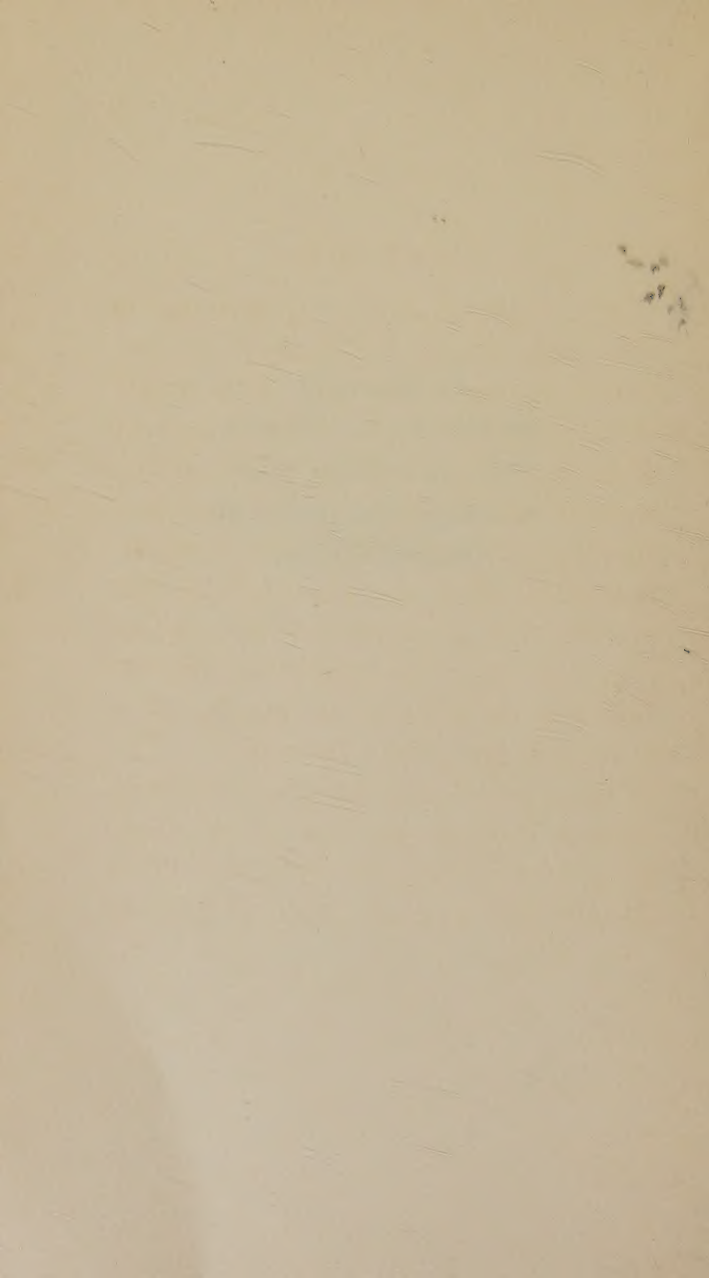
New York & London

**COPYRIGHT, 1925, BY
THE CENTURY CO.**

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

BV
652
G178

In Memory of
MY FATHER AND MOTHER
Who Spent Their Lives
In Loving Ministration in
Country Parishes



PREFACE

THIS little book invites you to read it at a single sitting. If read later, a section at a time, in the light of the whole story, it will give you a better account of itself. It is, I frankly acknowledge, written out of emotion. It does not therefore, I fear, contain all the words it implies—half the time falling into symbols and incidents to force a meaning; half the time taking for granted that you do not care to open or close every side gate along the way.

The view of a layman, as this easily betrays itself to be, may prove something of a shock to the rank and file of the clergy; but it will serve, at least, to

PREFACE

show that a section of laymen take religion more seriously after all than they do economics, which forms their daily adventure. Deep in our hearts, many of us know that business is the great masculine sport of the age; and in comparison, the rôle of the priest and pastor and the function of the church lie in the far different realm of the heroic. If I seem in this essay to expect too much of the church and too much of the preacher, my only apology is my inability to read into the Four Gospels, that stand on my desk along with the other tools of life and work, a philosophy of ease or of complacent *laissez faire*.

Although a confirmed lover of the country, the farm, the farmer and his children, I am none the less a firm believer in the city—its necessity, func-

PREFACE

tion, and destiny. Rural social welfare, as I see it, is of utmost concern to the American city. This is why empty churches along the countryside bring tragedy to city and country alike. This is why ecclesiastical statesmen should go to the country and see with their own eyes the havoc wrought upon the farmer's family by competitive religion among Protestants.

And this is all the little book sets out to do—to take everybody to the rural communities with wide-open eyes, to see the empty churches, the children without God, the farm tenants without religion, the parsons on the run for the city, and the beginnings of a new type of rural church.

I wish gratefully to acknowledge my indebtedness in this essay to the staff of the Institute of Social and Religious

PREFACE

Research, New York City, upon whose authoritative statements I have much relied. To the Curtis Publishing Company, Philadelphia, I desire to express appreciation for their kindness in allowing me to reproduce here materials which have appeared in "The Country Gentleman" during the past year.

C. J. GALPIN.

March, 1925.

EMPTY CHURCHES

1898

1898

EMPTY CHURCHES

CHAPTER I

RECENTLY, in a cross-roads country church, a minister of the Gospel, underpaid, somewhat shabby, but eager and inspired, a man with a message to give, stood before his congregation to present that message. The flame of inspiration in his haggard young face flickered and died as he looked down at the scanty congregation assembled before him to hear the Word of God. At a glance he counted his handful of hearers. Six.

Through a window on one side of

EMPTY CHURCHES

the little church, he could see two other meeting-houses nestling in the curve of the road. Through a window on the other side, he looked out at a third—four country churches of four Christian denominations, almost identical in doctrine, there within two stone's-throws of one another.

In three of these churches, including his own, he knew that the members of the congregation might be counted upon the fingers of each pastor's two hands. The third church was closed that day; its flock could afford only an occasional shepherd.

In all four of those churches put together, not one fair-sized congregation. In all four, not one pastor paid a salary large enough to enable him to live on his income as a minister. In all four, men and women taxed by religion beyond

EMPTY CHURCHES

their ability to pay, yet unable to support their church without outside aid.

Jealous Denominations

THE young minister thought with pain of other sections of the country through which he had traveled all day without seeing one church of any denomination. He knew that an appalling percentage of farm communities throughout the United States were entirely without churches, that thousands of children, hundreds of their elders, had never listened to the preaching of the Gospel. Yet here there were four churches at the country cross-roads!

That afternoon that young pastor wrote me a letter, wrote it in pain and bitterness, but also in hope, in earnest desire to get the facts before the nation:

EMPTY CHURCHES

I saw in the paper the other day some mention of the chief rural problems of the United States. May I call your attention to what ministers in every country district regard as the stiffest problem known to them and to their people? I refer to the problem of the competitive religion, which affects not only pastors, but the entire rural population, financially and spiritually, as well. The spiritual rivalry set in motion by well-meaning home-mission boards and zealous and jealous denominations is undermining the present and the future welfare of the country church by ignoring the law of supply and demand. If you can suggest any solution for this great problem, we shall all be grateful.

The case was in no way overstated by this young man. It is quite true that there are few, if any, greater rural problems to-day than the problem of the country church. It is undeniable

EMPTY CHURCHES

that any honest student of conditions in rural churches is confronted by staggering and depressing statistics of overchurching and underattendance in some sections, and of entire lack of attendance due to no churching at all in others.

Any map that showed the present rural church distribution of the United States would be alarmingly reminiscent of a map of a country with large areas of sterile famine-land. Nine persons out of every hundred in rural America can not get to church because there is no church for them to attend. This means that one seventh of all the rural communities of the United States are entirely without Protestant churches. Pathetic reports of the spiritual hunger of these land-dwellers, living in a Christian nation

yet entirely shut off from Christian organization of every kind, come from these communities.

“No Protestant sermon has ever been preached in this locality,” is one S O S sent out from a neighborhood of two hundred persons. “Not a child in this district has ever attended Sunday-school,” deprecates another community of approximately the same size. “This back-to-the-land movement is fine, but why should loyal land dwellers have to condemn their children to heathenry?” demands a distracted mother, in a remote section of a Western State. “My children are growing up to be little savages, as far as religion is concerned. They have never been inside a church in their lives, and they don’t know what Sunday-school means.”

EMPTY CHURCHES

Only one fifth of the rural population goes to church.

Two fifths of the rural churches of the country are standing still or losing ground.

A quarter of all rural churches have no Sunday-school.

One fifth of all rural churches are kept alive by home-mission aid. Of these subsidized churches, a large number are in active competition with churches of very similar doctrines.

Seven out of every ten rural churches have only a fraction of a pastor apiece.

One third of all rural pastors receive so low a salary that they can live only by working at some other occupation.

One half of the rural churches of the country make an annual gain in membership of as much as 10 per cent.

EMPTY CHURCHES

In striking contrast to this churchless seventh of the country, are the other six sevenths of rural America, many of them so overchurched that they are crying out for relief from the burdens the churches are laying upon them. There are ten times as many churches for every thousand persons in some of the rural districts of the United States as there are in New York City. Yet the percentage of attendance for every thousand persons is slightly lower in these rural sections than it is even in New York. Obviously, such a showing indicates a startling lack of system in the distribution of rural churches, a woeful waste of the religious potentialities of the country.

Recently, a thorough survey of the

EMPTY CHURCHES

rural church problem of the United States was made for the first time in the history of the country, under the direction of H. N. Morse and Edmund de S. Brunner, of the Institute of Social and Religious Research, of New York. Some of the statistics obtained by them are presented in the foregoing paragraphs.

These facts, of course, offer a severe shock to those who have the little white church of the countryside enshrined in memory along with the little red school-house. We have fallen into the rut of taking it for granted that our country churches not only keep pace with the best religious life of the nation, but even stay a step or two in advance, if not in theology, at least in interest in godly things and in piety. We have come to

think of country folk as the true church-goers of the United States. To this sentimental point of view the facts stated offer a true affront.

Fewer Church-goers

THERE are to-day approximately 101,000 rural churches in the United States. A long time ago, when there were only a hundred such churches, virtually the entire country population attended them. Some time later, when there were a thousand churches of the kind, the average of attendance was still exceedingly high. But of recent years the percentage of rural church-goers has almost seemed to be in an inverse ratio to the increase in churches. One out of every five is not a showing that would have brought joy to the Puritan Fathers. What is the reason

EMPTY CHURCHES

for this precarious situation in the rural churches of our nation? Does it indicate that our country population is made up of a less God-fearing folk than in former years? Does it demonstrate that religion is less near to the hearts of the farm workers of the United States than is true of its city dwellers? Or are these conditions the logical outgrowth of a faulty system, the inevitable result of a church distribution spiritually and economically unsound?

More than one thing must be taken into consideration in any fair-minded attempt to answer these questions. For instance, there is the fact that during the past few years the number of tenant-farmers in the United States has steadily increased, until now thirty eight per cent. of the farms are

tenant operated, most often on the basis of the one-year lease. Any fact that tends to make the farmer more or less a transient in the community naturally deters him from forming social or religious relationships.

Another reason frequently given for the low average of rural church attendance is that so high a percentage—nearly 30 per cent.—of the nation's land workers are new Americans, the foreign-born, or the children of the foreign-born. There are States, such as North Dakota, where nearly every other farmer belongs to other than American nativity, and whole sections of the country, as in the Middle West, where foreigners are in excess of two fifths of the population. It is estimated that at the present time more

EMPTY CHURCHES

than fifty per cent. of these people are unministered to by any church, Catholic or Protestant. Where anything like an earnest and comprehensive attempt has been made by churches to be of aid to them, as among the Mexicans of California, it has been marked by astonishing results. Then why have the churches done practically nothing for the foreign-born in rural sections? If the new American can make good on the land, is it too much to ask the church to make good with the new American?

When I hear it said that no one is really interested in religion any more, I cannot help thinking of an elderly Yankee farmer in the State of Vermont, one J. C. Coolidge, father of our President, a man who talks little

about religion, but who for years has given virtually all his leisure time, and a considerable slice of time not leisure at all, to keeping alive the little white church near his farm at Plymouth Notch. He hauls the wood from his own land that the congregation of that little church may listen in comfort to the Word of God; he even, I am told, does the janitor work himself, since the church has no funds for a janitor. There is nothing especially remarkable in this. There are thousands of such men all over our country, men to whom the church is a thing to make sacrifices for, to keep alive at whatever cost.

But in many districts it really seems that the fewer churches a county is able to afford, the more it is apt to have. Out of the 211 churches finan-

EMPTY CHURCHES

cially aided by home-missions societies in several counties where intensive studies were made by the Institute of Social and Religious Research, I am told that it was found that 149 of these churches could have been dispensed with without essential loss to anyone. All but thirty-four were competitive.

Untrained Country Preachers

ANOTHER grave charge is made against the church to-day in our country districts. Farmers feel that they are neglected by the ministers of their churches.

It is also charged that many rural pastors lack both adequate training and ability for their high calling. The real marvel is that so many of these men are of the high type they are.

EMPTY CHURCHES

It has to be admitted that there is ground for the charge of incompetency among some of the rural pastors of the United States. These men, it is true, are most inadequately prepared for their work. How are they to afford more training for a calling which will never pay them any returns upon it? That these men can develop into able preachers has been demonstrated by those who have had the opportunity to complete their courses in the summer school for ministers, inaugurated, I believe, by the Presbyterian Board and now conducted by several denominations. But most of them do not have this chance.

It is competitive religion that is largely responsible for these two dangerous factors in rural religious life—

EMPTY CHURCHES

the non-resident pastor, too occupied to be a true spiritual shepherd; and the incompetent pastor, too incapable to be a leader of his people.

But Christianity will not vanish from our country districts. Nowhere is there better soil for the seeds of true religion than in the sturdy soul of rural America.

It is not so much *isms* or *ologies* that the rural population wants as it is religious facilities for themselves and for their children. Some time ago, when a study of fifteen Western States was made by the Home Mission Council, it mentioned the following fact:

“The general feeling manifested by the returns shows little care for denominationalism. What these people want

is some one to present Bible facts in an acceptable manner."

The Call Can Be Met

THIS is as true to-day as it was when it was written ten years ago. Sunday-schools for their children; an adequate number of churches, not fewer than will meet their needs or more than they can support; usable churches, open the year round, with able ministers in charge—these are the things the population of our rural districts wants.

How are they to get them? By the installation of system into the religious life of the country sections. There are enough churches in the United States to-day, if they were distributed on the basis of a real need rather than on the grounds of competitive religion, to reach the remotest sections of our

EMPTY CHURCHES

country. The money now expended ✓
on nonproductive churches would purchase real vitality for essential churches all through rural America.

CHAPTER II

*“Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a
prey,
When wealth accumulates, and men
decay.”*

GOLDSMITH.

REGULAR men and women long for children as they long for good luck, long life, and sweet happiness. But they do not want just children, any kind whatever so that they be children. No indeed! It is always a whole, healthy child, a bright, intelligent child, a loving, obedient child, a beautiful, virtuous child, that lives warm in their dreams. And a child with such characteristics costs more

than many men and women can pay; for a well-bred child, like a well-bred colt, is the product of many favoring tides of good fortune.

Farms, The Place of Children

So it is that the Johns and Marys who leave the farm and its open spaces for city life give up having children of their own,—often without knowing it when they leave the country, to be sure,—and find themselves later doomed to work out human contentment in some other way; for the high cost of city space, of just sufficient elbow-room for a child to grow in and acquire the human characteristics desired, is almost as prohibitive as if a law were on the statute-books forbidding the rearing of children in city blocks. While my critic is biting his

thumb at this "exaggeration," gravely asserting that he knows there are many families of children in our American cities, I have caught his eye and will hold it long enough to tell him a thing disclosed by the last United States

— [Census report, viz., among the thirty millions of farm people, there are 4,000,000 more children under twenty-one years of age than there are among any thirty millions of city people. And this bald fact virtually declares the truth I am uttering—that the country contains the children of the nation, that the farm is the natural rearing-ground of well-bred children, and that the city core—the stamping-ground of business and adults—abhors children as "nature abhors a vacuum."

My story will not reach home, however, unless one pauses a moment to let

EMPTY CHURCHES

this census fact soak in. Here is an excess of children living on our farms that would make a small nation,—bigger than Switzerland, bigger than Chili, than Norway, than famous little agricultural Denmark.

Cities Get Youth from Farms

AND what will become of this excess of children? What else than this? The farms will manage to feed them, clothe them, educate them until they come of age, when, possessed of the strong right arm, they will turn their backs on the farm and farming, and go to recruit the nerve-fagged industry of cities.

The farms feed industry, professional service, and city life with muscle, intellect, and imagination. This is the romance, and there is not a word in

it of wheat, corn, cotton, or cattle. This every-day function of the farm, often spoken of lightly, almost as if it were a poetic fiction, is the solid stratum of fact upon which the plot of my story rests. The annual editorial blast, "Keep the boy on the farm," never concerns this slowly moving stream of young adults cityward, for these are a surplus, an excess. And they must go, as sure as fate. A legion of editorials could not dam back this flow.

We are not without some definite information, moreover, as to how this surplus of farm population works its way to the cities of the nation; for a unique study has been made by the United States Department of Agriculture—of the movement of 3000 young people from a thousand farms

EMPTY CHURCHES

in one community—over a period of one hundred years—a community where (and this fits into my story) the God of the Puritans has been known by the children from the days of the first log cabins. We know just which farms sent their surplus crop of young folk away. We know exactly where they went in the United States. And, furthermore, we know what vocations they recruited, and what achievements in these vocations they made. In a nutshell, we know in some measure what the contribution of human force and influence was from these thousand farms, farm by farm, to the upbuilding of the cities of the nation. The unfolding picture of this farm community's impact upon the nation's life during the century just passed is precisely the thing many persons have looked for

EMPTY CHURCHES

to put national meaning into the daily disappearance from the farms of the surplus of young adults which every few years amounts to a strong small nation poured into city industry.

I cannot pass this remarkable study by without naming some of the men who as "exportable surplus" left the old farmstead to work out careers in cities. I will name only those whom you know, and know to honor. You remember Governor George Peck of Wisconsin. You knew him as the *Peck* of "Peck's Bad Boy." Farm number 555 among these thousand farms gave Governor Peck to Wisconsin. Governor Reuben Wood of Ohio came from farm number 119. Governor Cushman Davis, of Minnesota, afterward United States Senator, was the product of farm number 556, just as much as the wheat

EMPTY CHURCHES

from that farm was a product and went into national trade. Farm number 618 gave Charles Finney to American Christendom and to Oberlin College as its honored president. Farm number 701 raised Charles N. Crittenton, gave him to the wholesale drug business in New York City, in which he accumulated wealth with which he put into operation his ideal for friendless girls. The Florence Crittenton Rescue Homes for girls in seventy-two cities of the United States tells his story. One of the little hamlets in the community produced Daniel Burnham, America's leading architect, at home equally in Chicago, New York, or Rome, Italy.

But these brighter lights of the exodus do not by any means convey what is perhaps after all the greater in-

fluence and might of the majority of the human surplus who went forth and found their places and played their rôles as less widely known personalities in enterprises of banking, manufacture, teaching, or merchandizing, where they helped weave the fabric of America and its institutions as we know them in every-day life.

The force of this plain story of the human product of good farms, in a community where God was known, lies not in what might be considered the exceptional character of the community, but rather in the fact that the story of this particular community of farms is the story, in one respect or another, of all American farm communities. This study convinces both men of the farms and men of the cities,—as it sets their memories to work about the mi-

grants from the land whom they have known—that as the farming communities wax or wane, so wax or wane the cities and the nation.

Many Children Virtual Pagans

AND here an unsuspected villain enters my story. Do not laugh in your sleeve when you discover that the villain is a fact, merely a fact; but, by the by, a very stubborn and blistering fact. Of the fifteen millions of farm children—children under twenty-one years of age,—more than four millions are virtual pagans, children without knowledge of God. If, perchance, they know the words to curse with, they do not know the Word to live by. This saddening fact is the solemn disclosure of the recent study, already mentioned, made by the Social and Re-

ligious Institute of New York City.

A survey of 179 counties in the United States, representatively selected, enables the Institute with confidence to assert that "1,600,000 farm children live in communities where there is no church or Sunday-school of any denomination," and "probably 2,750,000 more who do not go to any Sunday-school, either because the church to which their parents belong does not have any, or because they do not care to connect themselves with such an organization."

One does not get the real inwardness of this fact until one appreciates that these 1,600,000 of pagan children are not scattered evenly, or more or less evenly, among the other millions of children who are in contact with the Bible, but are in a great measure homed

in bibleless, godless communities. The nation might possibly assimilate a million bibleless children if they were brought up among several millions of children who know the concepts of religion; but absorbing godless children in great numbers from whole godless groups is a bird of a different feather. What is still more disconcerting, the trend, we are led to suppose, is not from bad to better, but from bad to worse.

“There is no national passion for seeking out the godless community and setting the Bible there,” we hear on every hand.

“The promoters of Bible study are too apologetic to business, to education, to pleasure, even, and go not about their tasks as those who have a commission from the nation,” many say.

But these bare statements fail, perhaps, to get hold of us. We must have particulars and the pulse of the thing. And so I wish to take a page out of my own experience and let you read it.

Trapped in a Godless Community

MY DUTIES, a while back, took me into the clover-bearing hills of a promising county in a dairy State. I stayed the night with a farmer's family, enjoying the hospitality and confidences of the home. Never shall I forget two episodes of the evening.

The milking was finally over—twelve mighty good cows. I had been allowed to milk three, taking the mother's place on her favorite milking-stool. Certain cows were "tender" and responded kindly to her gentler touch.

EMPTY CHURCHES

The house was on a side hill sloping steeply to the road, and across the road was a thinly timbered twenty-acre lot. The warm milk had been poured into ten-gallon cans and carried up to the house, where stood, in a neat little milk-house, a cream separator. When all was ready, the separator began to sing, the cream came trickling out, the skim-milk poured into a ten-gallon can, as the gaunt six-foot-three, narrow-shouldered farmer turned the crank. At the first whirring tune-up of the separator, I hear a scurrying of feet in the timber lot below, and soon a regiment of hogs and pigs were at the fence, standing with hind feet in the long trough, front feet over the top rail of the fence, black heads in a row, beady little eyes peering up the hill, open mouths giving vent to a long-

drawn squeal of jubilant petition. As the whir of the separator grew into a liquid hum, the squealing chorus rose to heaven, filling the valley, investing the farm, like a piece of symbolism, with the imperious demands of animals and crops upon the total energies of the family. Finally the last drop of milk went through the separator. Then the father put his hands to two handles of two ten-gallon cans of skim-milk; one son grasped the other handle of one can; another son caught hold of the handle of the second can; while each son in his remaining hand held a pail of the milk. Then they three, with two cans and two brimming pails, took up their stately march abreast down the hill to the squealing chorus at the trough. It looked for all the

EMPTY CHURCHES

world like some priestly ritual. The milk was poured into the trough. The pigs ceased to chant and began to suck, guzzle, push, and grunt. So the day's work was over, and we sought the house. Darkness fell over the hill and valley and the filled pigs lay down to sleep; while the farmer gathered his family about him, took up his Bible and read the Scriptures, even as did the cotter, whom Burns, the farmer Scot, made us know:

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,
How Abram was the friend of God on
high;
Or Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging
ire;

EMPTY CHURCHES

Or Job's pathetic plaint and wailing cry;
Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred
lyre.

Conversation in the morning brought out the fact that this hillside home was virtually the only one, in this clover community, struggling to bring up its children in the knowledge of God. No church, no Sunday-school, no parochial school, no Bible class. The gaunt father, gathering emotion as he overheard his own story, said:

"I have only one problem now. In twelve years my cows and hogs have paid for themselves, paid for my farm, built my barn and house. The one problem is not money any longer, but it is my boys and girls. They are just

EMPTY CHURCHES

now at the point where the home can no longer hold them, and they will, I fear, sink into the mire of this godless community."

"What do you mean, 'mire'?" I inquired.

"Well, it is hard to put into words," he continued. "Perhaps this will give you some idea: since I have been here, now twelve years, not a wedding has taken place anywhere hereabouts that has not been forced. And this is not the worst of it."

"Why don't you start a Sunday-school?" I urged.

"Too late!" he sighed. "My children are almost beyond me. I was, I fear, too busy with my cows and pigs, and the children just grew up before I knew it."

"What will you do?" I could not

EMPTY CHURCHES

refrain from asking, more to myself than to him, in my own perplexity, as I tried to share in the problem.

“The only thing I can do,” said he, as if the conversation had strengthened a previous resolution half-heartedly entertained, “is to yield to my wife’s judgment; sell the farm, go to some safe community where there is a church, Sunday-school, and a high school. We people here in this community made our great mistake in starting out wrong. We made a religion of our pure-bred hogs and cattle, and let our boys and girls go to the dogs.”

This tale of children, who turned out to have been unwittingly side-tracked by cows and hogs, recalled my own experience in breaking some new land in the Skims at a period in my

life when the doctor had said: "What you need is to get close to the land. Crawl around on the soil a year or two and you will learn over again how to sleep."

Well, with my old horse The Cid and a mail-order one-horse plow, I went through the motions of plowing that pine cut-over from which the pines had been skimmed off like cream from a milk-pan. Surveying the scratched and torn field, somewhat bruised and bleeding, I will declare it was, I said to myself:

"It does n't look really plowed; but it will be all right when I get it dragged."

Then The Cid did his very best at dragging. Dutifully—with an inner chuckle, I am sure, at my green expectations, for he was a seasoned

old Skims horse himself—he plodded along and over the field. At last I stood sweating and weary, looking it over, and was obliged to own up:

“It doesn’t look dragged; but it will be all right when I get it cultivated.”

I went through the form of marking and planting, and though I could n’t see the rows very well, I quieted my discontent by saying to myself, “It will be all right when I get it hoed.”

But when the corn came up, it was accompanied by such a community of weeds, briars, grass, and small bushes, that I could n’t cultivate because I could n’t see the corn.

After I had in much perplexity stared at the cultivator and then at the field, I looked that piece of work square in the face and averred:

“If I ever plow again, I am not

going to kid myself into thinking that the cultivator will straighten out the sins of the plow."

This raw-boned farmer and his wife, possessed of the fairest intentions in the world for their children, had become trapped in a godless community before they were aware of it; all because the seed-bed of human life had not been plowed deep with social religion at the very outset. Is this community a fair example of bibleless country groups? I believe it is. I am sorry to admit it, but I believe it is a fair type.

When the Bible Has No Interpreter

IF A nation can not build civilization securely without a knowledge of history, neither can children build character without a knowledge of those men

and women of history who have essayed to know God. The Bible is the story of such persons. It is biography. It is lives of those in whom the soul of man in his search for God has risen to its highest levels. There is no substitute for this Bible biography,—except, if you please, another Bible.

And perhaps, in point of Bible illiteracy, next to the community which has no Bible in it, lies the community in which, though there is a Bible, the leaders in teaching the Bible, or rather in explaining the Bible to the children, are themselves grossly ignorant, if not demoralized. The Bible is a book of many stories, of a host of incidents, of innumerable ideas. Selection is vital. To select from the Bible and hand on its meaning in grave ignorance is to run the risk that all ignorance runs.

EMPTY CHURCHES

Here is where many a rural community suffers, when it is commonly thought to be provided with a knowledge of God.

It fell to my lot recently to visit a small rural community of twenty-five families of this type. Only three of the families were totally without church connections, or at least church traditions. One church building has fallen in. One lies torn down. The third, still standing, is rotting. It is supposed to be "haunted." Splits disorganized and discouraged the people. A fourth rude church structure has come, but splitting up from within has begun. Ignorance of a crass sort rules. The Bible has had no well-balanced soul to interpret its wonderful truths.

The family histories of this settle-

EMPTY CHURCHES

ment run—to speak very grimly indeed—like an anthology of despair and depravity. Listen:

“She drowned her babies regularly in the creek.”

“He was said to be the father of his own daughter’s first child.”

“This woman was subnormal and has three illegitimate children.”

“This other woman is a menace to every man in the community.”

“He committed suicide.”

“She poured kerosene on the cat and set fire to it.”

“Boil nails in water to find out if person for which water is named committed a crime. If nails crackle and knock against the pan, then person named is guilty.”

“A person dies hard on feathers. We took mother’s bed out from under

her three times when we thought she was dying."

"Our children don't need to go to school to learn to read. The Spirit teaches them to read."

The people of these families looked, in the face, like people you meet in any fair group of folks; but their minds, their deeds, their hopes, their fears! There's the rub. Is this group of twenty-five families typical of country communities where the Bible is fought over by blind leaders of the blind? I am afraid it is. I admit it with shame, but I admit it. The Bible,—as if it were a plow found by persons who knew not its use, but who scrapped hard for its possession as an ornament of their dooryards,—the life-giving Bible in these hands is still a closed book and a locked-up treasure.

Pedigreed Austerity Better Than Ignorance

HUMAN life at its best is no mere accident which may happen anywhere under any conditions. The best has its pedigree. It is the result of infinite pains with children as with crops and animals. Even the austere, narrow-gaged leadership having a pedigree is far better than this ignorant, illiterate type.

I remember well as a lad how my father, a country minister, collegebred and trained in the theological school of his particular denominational stripe, stood rock-like in his parish for temperance. It was a grape country, with several wine distilleries. My father taught abstention from wine-drinking and preached against the

distilleries. One church pillar was in the wine business and furnished the sacramental wine. My father finally carried his logic to the point where he made announcement:

“Next Sunday at the Communion we shall not use fermented wine.”

Sunday came. A larger congregation than usual assembled. There was a tenseness of silent emotion in the stiff Sunday-dressed village and farmer folk, which I can feel yet, after forty years.

The communion-table was set. I see my father now, as he picked up the flagon of wine and poured into the chalice. He paused—on his face a sudden look of bewilderment. Then slowly he poured the chalice of wine back into the flagon, strode to the door, and emptied the contents on the

ground. Quietly resuming the ceremony he said:

“We will commune without wine to-day.”

The distiller had done his dirty work, and put one over on the country parson. But the parson, although he caused a sense of consternation to creep over the church folk,—akin to the horror in the multitude when *Count Antonio*, in Anthony Hope’s tonic story, laid hands on the Sacred Bones in midstream,—by this daring act helped plug the bung-holes and spike the spigots in the cellars of that county. And the whole countryside, be it said, responded to the resolute will of my father to make God known to a community steeped in wine.

My father probably shared the narrow-mindedness of his particular

pedigree, but he certainly hewed to the line like a prophet of old. His crop of young converts came usually in winter; but the snow and ice had no deterring chill for him. He never thought of postponing the baptismal rite till summer. He had a large hole cut through in the little river near by, for water helped mightily in his system of doctrine. He didn't spare me either. At eleven years of age, he led me, as he did my country playmates, out of the sleigh, down the snowbank, into this ice-water. There was no softening of the ideals of life in that parish, I can tell you. And the God of Daniel was known and acknowledged there in fear and trembling.

When, in after years it fell to my fortune to live on the Skims and to woo sleep with logging, stumping, and

“scratching” the land, I saw what a real Sunday-school would do even in a submarginal community for the children of the pine cut-over. There was the farmer widow woman with the man’s hands. What would have been her chances of rearing her seven children to usefulness and self-respect without that weekly community-school under good leadership?

I hear again her breezy, cheery call to her brood as she drives up to the little church.

“Pile out.”

“Pile in,” when Sunday-school is over.

A slap of the lines, and a piece of rural America goes back to its cabin, minds sprayed with race lore. A mighty wholesome sight in a community of tools with broken handles, of

EMPTY CHURCHES

harnesses toggled with hay-wire, of fortunes "busted", of the blind, and of those who could not sleep.

There was the old retired farmer, Scotch McDugle, too, eighty years old. He would come over from next door of an evening and swap Skims stories for a cheery welcome and a listening ear. It would be midwinter. The sheet-iron stove showed red.

"Come in, Mr. McDugle," my wife would say. "Take off your hat and mittens."

"Oh, no, no," he would reply, "just stepped in to say 'howdy.' Can't stay a minute."

Then McDugle would settle down for the evening close to the red-hot stove, mittens drawn tight, Scotch cap pulled close down over his ears. As he got limbered in memory, he would

go through a set of queer antics with his lips and tongue—little dry, staccato sputters. He reminded me in this of a courtly neurasthene I once met who said, as he went through similar tongue motions, "I beg your pardon, but I have a hair on the tip of my tongue which I seem never able to get off."

Farmer McDugle's favorite theme was the making of great American men out of "hard knocks" and "a good pinch of God." He reveled in Lincoln, whom he had known; and he never got tired of weaving the people he knew in with the race-heroes of all time.

As I think of McDugle and his ilk in these later days, I can not help suspecting that bleak little Scotland and God in the life, despite the stain

EMPTY CHURCHES

of the “wee drap o’rye,” account for many of America’s man-making rural communities.

When Catholic and Protestant Agree

THE chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, in a call published (in the April 1924 number of “St. Isadore’s Plow”) for the second annual Catholic Rural Life Conference, says:

“We have two distinct entities of population, and, we might say, of civilization in the United States—the urban and the rural. The church is decidedly urban. So far as the Church is concerned, the country towns and villages are still ‘pagani.’ ”

Thus you see Protestant and

Catholic agree in seeing the menace of rural paganism within the borders of Christian America.

This is not the moment to settle the blame for this condition on any persons or sects. It is rather the time for a statesmanlike move to meet the menace. Bible instruction of worth, dignity, intelligence, in every community, made accessible to the last child, is an aim which alone can meet the case. But this is an herculean stunt, and requires some of the same sweep of coöperative, universal momentum as drove out yellow fever, malaria, and is fighting pellagra, hook-worm, and tuberculosis. Bible illiteracy ranks as a problem with book illiteracy; and as great a unanimity is required to root it out as to eradicate book illiteracy. A hundred different religious bodies in

the United States have striven more or less fitfully in the past with this problem. But far more is needed than the hundred-headed effort. When, in the late war, the Allies came to their senses and found that their struggle was not a rope-pull nor a barbecue, but a life-or-death struggle, they elected Foch to give universality of will to the cause of defense.

The children of rural America deserve by good rights a Foch to lead the forces of Bible literacy against a creeping, godless paganism. I have refrained from presenting the religious case for this crusade. The menace is so great that the social appeal should be sufficient—and should reach every intelligent lover of America, be he fundamentalist, modernist, ethicist, or just plain man.

CHAPTR III

WILLIAM JAMES, the Harvard psychologist, used to say in his class-room: "I must fight the devil and his wiles, for God needs me. I may help save the day."

In the same room, the next hour, Josiah Royce, the philosopher, would say, "I must set my heel on Satan's neck, for God's victorious spirit is in me."

Whichever of these two schools of moral action one belongs to, one is bound, you see, to fight the devil and his guile; and in country life this is no

EMPTY CHURCHES

joke, for as it turns out, the devil waved a mighty wicked wand over the American farm tenant when he jockeyed him on to the land into the shoes of the departing farm owner. It was a devilish, cunning trick to decoy the owner, body and soul, into town and into the town church—away from the little country church of his fathers. It was, however, the meanest lick of Satan against the peace of the tenant to bewitch him into flitting from farm to farm and from community to community. And now the situation has come to such a pass that, unless the American church has the grace and backbone and subtlety to outgeneral the devil in his game, the devil wins; for in matters of religion, the landless man is between the devil and the deep sea.

“Churches Detour—Tenants ‘Ahead’”

IT IS old stuff, in a way, this cheerless story of farm tenants and religion. Pick up, as I have done, either at random or quite methodically, booklets, chapters, articles, or pamphlets dealing at first hand with the farm tenant, and the tale of his religious handicap runs drearily, hopelessly to the same sad end. For example, take this rather mild statement from a member of Roosevelt's Country Life Commission:

“The farm owner who has moved to town and is renting his land cannot be expected to be a real, vital force in the rural church. Nor can the tenant who has a one-year lease, or whose tenure is uncertain, be expected to cultivate the Christian graces by

intimate fellowship with his neighbors and associates; in other words, to take root in the community and become a part of it."

"Why, then," it will be asked, "try to dress up the outworn subject again?"

The plain answer, without any apology, is simply this: The farm-tenant case, as a phase of religion in eclipse, has not yet cast an image on the American mind. The American church,—and I class together all the Christian bodies in this sweeping term,—the Christian conscience of the American church has apparently reversed itself and "passed by on the other side" of this bedeviled situation. Now such an attitude, such collective behavior, is ruthless, well nigh unforgivable, and in fact incomprehensible.

Words must continue to be spoken until the church ceases to detour around the tenant.

The Flood of Tenancy Unabated

AND first of all, in order to see the gravity of the case as it stands, one must sense the resistless character of the sweeping flow of tenancy itself. Decade by decade the flood has risen. In 1880, 25.6 per cent. of the farms in the United States were tenant farms; in 1890, 28.4 per cent.; in 1900, 35.3 per cent.; in 1910, 37.0 per cent.; in 1920, 38.1 per cent.

If one looks a little closer at the regions where the flood is highest—almost over the dikes, so to speak—the truth strikes home a little stronger. In the east South-central States, containing Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama,

EMPTY CHURCHES

Mississippi, the percentage in 1880 was 35.2; in 1890, 38.6; in 1900, 49.1; ✓ in 1910, 52.8; in 1920, 49.6. In the west south-central area, containing Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, the percentage in 1880 was 35.2; in ✓ 1890, 38.6; in 1900, 49.1; in 1910, 52.8; in 1920, 53.2. In the west north-central area, containing, as a very vital part of American agriculture, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, the percentage in 1880 was 20.5; in 1890, 24.0; in 1900, 28.6; in 1910, 30.0; in 1920, 34.1.

When the United States Census Report for 1920 came out and was scanned, it was discovered by every one that in the decade between 1910 and 1920 the flood of tenant farms had in number gone down in some States a

little, as in Alabama and Mississippi, a fact which brought a decline in the east south-central area from 52.8 per cent. in 1910 to 49.6 per cent. in 1920. But lest the friends of agriculture in America should be put under ether by this disclosure, Dr. C. L. Stewart, now professor in the University of Illinois, while a member of the United States Department of Agriculture, in a statement entitled, "The Persistent Increase of Tenant Farming," called attention to the fact that the bare number of tenant farms is a less accurate index of the sweep and meaning of tenancy than the acreage involved and the value of that acreage:

"When measured on the basis of acreage and value, the number of rented acres per thousand and the number of dollar's worth of rented land per

EMPTY CHURCHES

thousand was not only higher (in 1910 and 1920) than that shown on the preceding basis (number of rented farms), but has been growing at much faster rates during both of the decades since 1900, especially during the decade just ended. . . . In the light of this analysis, the tide of tenancy is shown by the latest census to have continued with little or no abatement."

In sober truth, this flood-tide of tenancy is no mere passing phenomenon in the adolescent experience of America, but is a settled characteristic now being wrought into the texture of American life. As a social and economic force, tenancy is here to stay. Statesmen may well build their dikes higher against it; but American religious leaders—the makers of ecclesiastical policy—must from now on

EMPTY CHURCHES

gravely take farm tenancy into their reckoning, or assume spiritual responsibility for its continued religionless character.

Locating the Devil's Quarry

LET us draw a bit closer to these tenant folks and look them in the eyes. There they are, in round numbers two and a half millions of tenant operators; or, perhaps, better reckoned for our purpose as twelve millions of people, counting all persons in the tenant families both old and young. But, as almost everybody knows, there are a few vast differences among tenants, and we must sift a little and sort out the group that the devil is laying his finger on and claiming as his own.

A tenant who is a son or daughter of the landlord, or otherwise related to

the landlord by blood or marriage, is without question not only a privileged person and his family a privileged family among tenants, but, what is more to the point, living on family lands as he most generally does, the "related tenant" is so often an owner in prospect with a deed "in escrow" as the law would put it, that while nominally a tenant, he is an owner in thin disguise, and virtually has in the community the status of an owner. The census does not declare what percentage of the twelve millions of tenant folk belongs to this favored class; but whatever the percentage is, it is obviously decreasing with the decreasing percentage of owner-operating families. Representative studies made by the United States Department of Agriculture indicate that 23 per cent. of

EMPTY CHURCHES

the tenant population belongs at present to this group. If we accept this estimate, then, in 1920, there were 2,760,000 persons in the families of "related tenants."

To protect my story against the will to exaggerate the landless element, let us call the total number of "related tenants" three millions; and then let us deduct this whole group from the twelve millions of tenant folks. This leaves nine millions of tenants unprivileged by birth or marriage in respect to land.

Lest any one should feel, furthermore, that I am trying to make, under cover, a case of the colored tenant,—whose situation is confessedly special and should not, for obvious reasons, be confused with that of white tenants,—let us sift and sort again and take out

EMPTY CHURCHES

three and a half millions of colored tenant folk, old and young. The residuum is five and a half millions of white tenants. This is the group that has swelled in numbers during the past four decades. This is the group that is all the time spreading over more and more acres, all the time creeping on to more and more valuable land. This group of landless men, women, and children (I do not mean to say that this is the only landless group of white farm people, for the agricultural-labor class makes another story), occupying more and more the strategic positions in agriculture and country life, contains the devil's quarry.

Tenants On the Go

WE MUST add one more particularly distressing feature to our general pic-

EMPTY CHURCHES

ture. In December and January in the South, or in March in the North, there is a great stir among these tenants, for moving-time has come. During the year between December 1, 1921, and December 1, 1922, according to a statement put out by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, entitled, "Farm Occupancy, Ownership, and Tenancy, 1922," "nearly 663,000 shifts on farms exchanging tenants" occurred of which "nearly 250,000 tenants were indicated to have either discontinued farming for some other occupation or moved out of their communities."

In this exodus, poverty tags along, poverty carrying in her apron all the witch's ills—hard luck, dimmed lights of the mind, illness, inferiority written in behavior, stolid despair, indiffer-

ence to improvement, insensibility to refinements. In the South, poverty hangs on to the coat-tails of the "Cropper"—him of the lowest estate of the tenant. In 1920, according to the United States Census Report, there were 227,378 white croppers, more than one million white cropper folk.

Behold a host, comparable with the host of Israel on the way to Canaan. The roads are filled with teams, with jags of household belongings, with led or driven cattle, horses and mules, with loads of women and children. A small nation is folding its tents and moving on ere its tents have fairly got pitched. White tenants alone,—and mind you, out of the group of five and a half millions of landless people,—an army of 1,375,000 souls; and of these, more than a half a million going across the

border of the community into a strange land for another short sojourn. This is the picture you will see every year—over a quarter of all tenants moving, and ten per cent. of all tenants moving into strange associations among strange people.

Outcasts From the Church

IN THEIR recent study, "The Town and Country Church," Dr. H. N. Morse and Dr. de S. Brunner, of the Institute of Social and Religious Research, have this convincing word to say about the church and the farm tenant:

"The church in the country areas is not, generally speaking, the church of the landless man. In a study of all the churches in 179 counties, located in 44 States, the situation, which we believe is reliably representative of con-

EMPTY CHURCHES

ditions in the United States as a whole, is this: The percentage of farm owners who are members of churches in the South is 59.5, while of tenants who are members the percentage is 33.5; in the Southwest, of owners, 26.2, while of tenants, 9.2; in the Northwest, of owners, 16.4, while of tenants, 7.4; in the Middle West, of owners, 47.9, while of tenants, 20.3; in the Prairie, of owners, 55.6, while of tenants, 15.8."

These two authorities on the farmer's church, draw from their study of the high and low tenancy areas in 175 counties this further conclusion: "The larger the proportion of farm tenants in an area, the more conspicuously unreached by the church is the landless man." Here are their figures, see for yourself:

"In counties where tenancy runs

EMPTY CHURCHES

from 0 to 10 per cent., the percentage of farm owners who are church members is 13.7, while the percentage of tenants who are church members is 12.4; where tenancy runs from 11 to 25 per cent., the percentage of owners as church members, is 26.8, while of tenants, 19.8; where tenancy runs from 26 to 50 per cent., the percentage of owners is 48.2, while of tenants, 23.6; where tenancy runs over 50 per cent., the percentage of owners who are church members is 63.6, while the percentage of tenants who are church members is 23.9."

When we look into this statement, it is plain that in the low tenancy areas the "related tenants" on "family lands" bulk large, and they rank, as we know, with owners themselves; but when we get into the high tenancy areas, we

EMPTY CHURCHES

strike the core of tenants unrelated to the landlord. Here is the mass of our 5,500,000 landless tenant folk, and here is where the church has weakened and fallen down. Five millions of these white landless tenants are in the high tenancy areas. And applying this church study to our problem, while the church reaches 55 per cent. of the owners in these areas it reaches only 24 per cent. of the tenants. That is, 1,200,000 of these landless tenants only are inside the circle of direct religious influence, and 3,800,000 are outside. If these 5,000,000 persons had been owners of land, or inheritors of land in waiting, the church would have reached 2,750,000 of them instead of 1,200,000; in other words here are 1,550,000 tenant people who are outcasts from the church simply be-

cause they are landless folk. And these outcasts—these religionless pariahs—are on the increase from year to year as tenancy increases its hold upon the nation.

One Hundred Per Cent. Material for Religion

IT SURELY will not be misunderstood if a layman should call to mind that the genius of Christianity is its perennial Gospel—just good news—to the poor, the broken in life's struggle. If a fitter multitude than these tenants for the good tidings of the Christ can be found on the face of the earth, I would like to learn of them. The ordinary life of these outcasts, these wanderers from spot to spot seeking the sun that refuses to shine, has precisely all of those breakdowns which the Christian

EMPTY CHURCHES

religion promises to repair—poverty, invalidism, death, sin. It seems to me that these pariahs are just naturally made to order for the kind of religion that the American church has to offer; but as I see it, and I have looked this thing in the face from angle after angle, they haven't got a ghost of a show at it the way the church system of the country at present works out. Speaking straight from the shoulder, the devil wins, unless— And where is the person who will rise and name the great “unless” that can fix this church system up and set the heel of the church on Satan's neck?

The history of the church, running back through the centuries, is, as I read it, dotted with awakenings, with the rise of a thought, of a hope-dream, with the rise of a man who out of the

very fog and blackness of popular waywardness, wantonness, unbelief, depravity, has stood up and successfully denied that human life must be all to the strong and that the poor must live unillumined. This has been the type of man who has lit the torch of love and solicitude and faith in the world that has lighted the race generation after generation. Is this not the time in the life of the American church and this the occasion in America for such a man to arise and call a halt upon the detour of the church around the farm tenant?

CHAPTER IV

“**H**IRELING!” A sour epithet to hand a preacher; but the word is not mine. Look at it, if you will, in its original setting and judge for yourself:

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth. . . . The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.”

So spake the Man of Sorrows, who, as he went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, spake as never man

spake. And nineteen centuries of unbroken Christian usage look down upon "pastor and flock" as an almost perfect characterization of preacher and parish. Passing quickly through the gateway leading up to the porch of my tale, let me in a few words taken from "Town and Country Church in the United States," set before you the pastor-and-flock-hard-luck story in rural America:

"The total number of communities within the town (town refers to places of 5,000 people or less) and country area is 73,230."

"There are 33,808 communities, or 42 per cent. of the total number, that have churches, but do not have within them any resident pastors."

✓ "It would require 34,181 more min-

EMPTY CHURCHES

isters giving their full time to the work of the ministry to provide one for each community, if they were evenly distributed."

"The great advantage of the town over the village, and of both town and village over the country, in the matter of resident pastors, is a characteristic of all regions and of virtually all counties. Thus, while 78 out of every 100 town churches have resident pastors, and 60 out of every 100 village churches, only 17 out of every 100 country churches have them, and less than 5 out of every 100 country churches have full-time resident pastors."

In a nutshell, this is the inglorious fact: 30,000 flocks in rural America have no shepherds. Thirty thousand

rural flocks are open to the wolf—because (for it so appears) American preachers care not for country sheep.

Sentenced to Purgatory

AN EMINENT rural-life leader a few weeks ago came back from a country-life conference of rural ministers, reporting that these ministers had a saying among them, "A country charge (pastorate) is a sentence to purgatory."

This report sounds like a piece of clerical humor; grim, maybe, but harmless and meaning nothing. Would to God this were true! Then perhaps the picture of these 30,000 shepherdless flocks might turn out to be only a nightmare. I tried to shake the thing out of my mind; but immediately the long line of my ministerial acquaint-

EMPTY CHURCHES

ances passed unwillingly before me; and I solemnly affirm that, with a few princely exceptions, these men after being plunged into their ministry, coming up for air, as it were, faced toward the city parish as flowers turn toward the light; from the country, they struck out for the village; from the village, they struck out for the town; from the town, they struck out for the city; from the city, they struck out for the metropolis.

The Preacher's Flight

THE more I struggled to free myself from a conclusion on this matter, the deeper into conviction I sank. I recalled, much against my inclination, a bad half-hour several years ago at the headquarters of one of the great religious bodies of America. The oc-

casion was the meeting of the National Social Service Commission of that denomination. I had just finished reading a report, which expressed the idea that we might look forward to the day when country parishes would be put up in packages containing people enough supporting one church, so that churches in the country would be as powerful, ministers in the country would be as influential, as city churches, on the one hand, and city ministers on the other. A captain of city industry was a member of the commission. During my paper, hands in pockets, he paced the floor up and down—somewhat to my discomfiture as I recall. When I concluded reading, he broke out with:

“Bosh! All bosh! The country church will always be of little account.

It gets culls for ministers—it always has; it always will. Just as I left the farm for the city to improve my lot, so every country minister who can will leave the country parish for the city parish to improve his lot.”

That I suffered a shock as if by lightning may easily be imagined. The steel-blue tone of this man did something to my heart; did something to my faith in human nature hard to define. This captain of industry—and I suspect that this is what did the damage—never seemed to question the legitimacy of the preacher’s flight. Representing, as he did, the leading laymen of his denomination, quietly accepting the exodus of country preachers as perfectly normal—because running true to the economics of good business instinct—he appalled

me with his cynicism. And it took me many a month, I confess, to get back my belief in humankind. But it came back, and came back strong in the following manner:

Around the Glover's Cot

BY ACCIDENT, one summer, I made a find; in one of the 30,000 pastorless parishes, a man lying prone on a cot; the cot standing on a stone-boat; the stone-boat lying close to a deep pool in the bend of a little river, in the shade of a great elm-tree; the man all alone, flat on his back, silently whipping the trout-pool with his fly. I came to believe in this helpless fisherman, and again all things good and beautiful seemed possible. I got the story from his sister, but can give only hints of it here.

As a boy on the farm he had made up his mind to get an education. At sixteen he was looking forward impatiently to beginning his courses of study, when one day in the woods a tree which the men folks were cutting down fell on him and broke his back. He never walked again, nor, in fact, ever again sat up. Doomed to lie on his back, all his hopes blighted, he asked for something to do with his hands. They gave him needle and thread, shears and a piece of buckskin. He made a pair of clumsy buckskin gloves. He made a less clumsy pair. He made pair after pair, better and still better. Then dozens of pairs, until his skill built up a small business. But his ambition mounted with success, and he asked whether he could n't study something.

“Can’t I study law?” he pleaded.

They got him law-books. He read law, he made buckskin gloves; he made gloves, he read law. He was admitted to the bar. He became justice-of-the-peace in his backwoods settlement. Men got to coming for miles to the glover’s cot to tell their troubles and look into his deep eyes, hear his counsel, and feel his glad hand. He was a real peacemaker under the guise of a lawyer. His ethics backed up to and rested upon the Sermon on the Mount. He bought land, hired it tilled, built himself a better house, and settled into the character of a country squire. He was of the little church flock, and the rest of the flock came to set great store by his good sense, his wholesome cheer, indomitable activity, and, withal, his straight reliance on God. In fact, the

helpless glover's dwelling was the meeting-place for the flock about as often as the church building; for everybody said, "We get new strength to keep a-going when we meet around the cot."

The Modern Wolf a Playful Cub?

SEE how I got back my faith? The prone fisherman on his stone-boat was a godsend to me. I saw that personal life is so rich that no one can be broken in body to the point where, in case he "layeth down his life for the sheep," he will be making a mean gift. I half suspect that God raises up out of the ground, as it were, in many of these pastorless communities a proxy for the parson that, beholding the wolf, leaveth the sheep and fleeth to the city—a proxy, like the glover-lawyer, who is no

quitter. And in some parishes where the preacher still sticks (his face set, however, toward the city) I fancy a man or a woman or a child can be found who is naïvely scaring off the wolf.

Norris Shepardson was such a man. Farmer, poet, refined spirit, he went about his work making everybody believe that a new day is fresh from God. Ambrose Brimmer, a member of the community, didn't happen to be much of a churchman, and his Sunday haymaking teased the parson mightily. I remember well one perfect trout day, when Ambrose was showing me the holes in a stream strange to my rod, that we got to talking about preachers.

"I don't care a damn if the parson does see me haying on Sunday," said Ambrose; "but if I get a sight of

EMPTY CHURCHES

Norris Shepardson driving up the road, I skedaddle and hide, you bet! You know Norris Shepardson. Well, Norris Shepardson is a Christian and no quack."

And Ambrose was right. Norris Shepardson was a Christian from his eyelashes to his finger-tips; and his sweet belief in you put you straightway under obligation to goodness when he cast a glance your way.

It is probably true that I have been something of a modern-life fan. But when I try to think of the Master's parables of the shepherd, the sheep, and the wolf, and of the one sheep that was lost while the ninety and nine were safe in the fold, I confess that I am troubled about my modern-life philosophy.

Are modern sheep any the less in

need of a downright shepherd because they are modern?

Is n't there a wolf any longer in times that are modern? Or may he perhaps be just a playful cub? Or possibly, by this time, a toothless, plain, doddering beastling?

Has the age of lofty heroism in religion—the age of sheer contempt of some of the traditional goods of life—clean passed away? And does economics furnish the better clue in modern days to those who are called of God to preach?

Do we need any 30,000 more preachers in the country trenches? Do we need any shock troops at all? Is n't it perfectly orthodox pacifism in these days for all the picked soldiers in the war on the devil to fall back into comfortable winter quarters?

Side-stepping the Law of Hire

I TRY to find my answer to these troubling queries in a glance down the centuries. There are the barefoot Black Friars of Dominic and the Gray Friars of Francis of Assisi (him who took poverty for his bride) in the thirteenth century. They gloried in mean clothes, mean shelter, mean food, as they ministered out of their own poverty to the poor, the overlooked, the no-accounts (in cities, then, because the troop of comfortable parsons were fattening in the popular country districts).

There are the visionaries and enthusiasts: John Bunyan in the seventeenth century; John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth. In the very face of the plentiful, complacent

clergy, they fought the wolf as if they had been apostles living in the first century.

There is Jean Frederick Oberlin, in the early part of the nineteenth century, who protested, "I do not wish to labor in some comfortable pastoral charge where I can be at ease. I want a work to do which no one else wishes to do, and which will not be done unless I do it."

Oberlin had just won his degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Strasburg, at a time when Strasburg was a city of France. His "call" to pastoral duty came all of a sudden with the wind of a February evening rushing in at the door as a stranger stepped into the bare room. Struck with the poverty of the place, Pastor Stuber introduced himself.

Beard's translation from the French presents us with the picture:

"I have learned about you, Herr Oberlin. Your name has been mentioned to me as one who does not follow the beaten paths of ministerial candidates. You have studied surgery and medicine. You have a knowledge of botany and herbs. Is this not so?"

"In my leisure hours I have paid some attention to botany, to blood-letting, and the experiences of the anatomical room," replied Oberlin.

"Will you be kind enough to explain to me what this little pan means that I see here by your lamp?" asked Stuber.

A deep blush ran over Oberlin's face. "Pardon the cooking, Herr Pastor. I take my dinner with my

parents, and I bring away some bread which my mother gives me. At eight o'clock I put this little pan over my lamp, place my bread in it, with a little water and salt. Then I go on with my studies."

"You are my man!" exclaimed Stuber, rising from his chair. "You live on the diet of Lacedæmon. Yes, you are my man. I see you do not understand me; but I have got my man, and I shall not let you go. I want you for the pastorate of Waldbach in the Ban-de-la-Roche. There a hundred poor and wretched families in want of the bread of life; four or five hundred to shepherd and to save, poor, wretched, friendless."

Oberlin's heart was in a tumult. This was just the field of labor he had wished. But what of the difficulties?

“The parish must be in a very cold region,” suggested Oberlin.

“My dear Oberlin, I do not wish to exaggerate anything. Six months of winter; at times the cold of the Baltic; sometimes a wind like ice comes down from the mountain-tops above; the sick and dying are to be visited in remote, wild, solitary places in the forests.”

“And the parishioners, are they well disposed?” inquired Oberlin.

“Not too much so, not too much. They are frightfully ignorant and untractable, and proud of their ignorance. It is an iron-headed people, a population of Cyclops.”

Oberlin was taking in the situation. He slowly lifted his large blue eyes and asked: “You say most of the parishioners are extremely poor? Are there resources to aid the poor?”

“The parishioners have nothing. Four districts even poorer than the mother parish are to be served. Not a single practicable road. Deep mud-holes among the cabins. The people, abandoned to indifference, have not the least concern to meliorate their condition.”

“Every one of your words has knocked at the door of my heart like the blows of a hammer,” said Oberlin. And it was settled that Oberlin would go to the mountains; and on March 30, 1767, in his twenty-seventh year, Oberlin arrived at Waldbach.

No single piece of literature equals the story of Jean Frederick Oberlin's pastorate in the Ban-de-la-Roche as an interpretation of a country minister's social, economic, and religious relation

to his parish. Overture after overture came to him during the years to give up his laborious cares in the hills and take charge of a church where cultured life would bring with it superior advantages, greater recognized honor, and a satisfactory salary. His answer was the same to all:

“No, I will never leave this flock. God has confided this flock to me. Why should I abandon it?”

And in that out-of-the-way parish he played the shepherd and the man for nigh on to sixty years. Like the Venerable Bede in the eighth century, he died with the shepherd's crook in his hand.

Preachers' Alibis Pass Inspection

Now tell me, was Oberlin—remember he is only a hundred years away from

our time—temperamental and absurdly heroic? Was the nineteenth-century wolf any less tender with the nineteenth-century flock than the first-century wolf with the first-century flock? Is the modern “world-the-flesh-and-the-devil” just a bugaboo to frighten children? Is modern sin a whiter stain on the soul and more easily washed out than in any previous century? It would take a braver man than I am to champion modern life to such lengths.

These 30,000 runaway American preachers,—they all have good reasons for running. As alibis go, they are perfect—humanly speaking. I have often heard the recital: “Easier life for the wife,” “education for the children,” “an American standard of liv-

ing," "congenial parish," "books," "travel," "art," "greater opportunity for service."

Just such reasons as bankers, clerks, teachers, merchants give for their economic movements—to better themselves, following the law of hire. And nobody protests; for nobody is in a position to protest, as the law of hire seems to regulate the life of all. The protest—the only great protest—comes everlastingly up from the first century:

"A certain scribe came, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

The Plight of Him Who Stays

THE preacher that sticks by the farm community takes pot-luck with the farmer himself; and the socio-economic plight of the farmer has had front-page head-lines since the time of President Theodore Roosevelt. To-day, in the time of President Calvin Coolidge, those head-lines have become bigger and blacker. The farmer's dollar, meanwhile, has become small and weak. His taxes have risen overnight like a spring freshet. His debts stare him in the face. His children are forsaking him for the high wages and high life of the city. He cannot pay the wages of labor in competition with automobile factories.

The farmer's social system in America has broken down under the strain of

new forces. He needs the social help of men and women who will share his life, his privations, his hopes and fears. But they are to be men and women who see the farmer's plight and, giving themselves to the task, struggle to organize a modern rural social system. It is fruitless here to recite the tale of an underpaid country clergy, with its sequel of a socially visionless, untrained set of honest parsons; fruitless to point out how denominational strife has cut down the preacher's salary to less than a living wage. True, the country parson has his poverty, and needs not to take any extra "vow of poverty." This sort of thing will go on and on until there is a right-about on the part of those preachers who flee the country as if it were the plague. Strong men of social vision, men who

have come to understand the farmer's social and economic plight, must turn their back on the city, and take up labors for the country flock.

A New Type of Training School

BUT will there ever be such a right-about-face of virile, holy men until we have in America a new type of theological seminary for the training of country-bound ministers of Christ? I doubt it. The present schools of training are city-set, city-wise, city-satisfied; not but that a score or more of them give some "rural courses"; not but that a trickle of men has started already from them toward the country. You can better understand the case if I were to ask what hope there would have been for agricultural science, if total reliance had been placed upon the

great city universities, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Chicago, Pennsylvania, to develop the practice of farming. Each of these universities has already made some notable contribution to agriculture in one form or another; but the great hope of agriculture lay in a farming college, and fortunately, the common sense of this country perceived this truth.

In like manner, the hope of the rural ministry, in my estimation, lies in a rural theological seminary under the eaves of one of our great colleges of agriculture—preferably a college of agriculture in close proximity to a great state university. Here is the farmer's intellectual center. Here are gathered men and women of hope for farm life. Here are the men and women who have social vision for rural

society. In touch with these men and women, under the spell of the intelligent hope for the American farm and farmer, a school of religion can grow up which will train men to go into the country and help redeem it from its present social chaos. They can carve out community churches of distinction. They can create a line of such churches, wholly in rural territory, which will furnish steps of promotion for the most strenuous and ambitious pastors. Flight is not the cure of the plight of country parsons. The cure is rather intelligent consecration to the country flocks.

CHAPTER V

BUT," went on the author of Christian idealism,—mind you, in the same breath in which He had paid to His followers the superb compliment, "Ye are the salt of the earth,"—"if the salt have lost its savor—"

And the story of Protestant home missions in rural America during the last two or three decades has in it the taste of this "lost savor."

Let me lay bare before you,—with the shame of a churchman very much embarrassed, it must be confessed,—not so much the facts of this unsavory home-mission story, for the facts have been public property for some years, as

an interpretation of the facts and an appraisal of the damage done to American churchdom.

For the benefit of him who does not understand the situation at all, a word is necessary. Here is the picture, and here are the essential features in the picture, whatever variations there may be in minor details.

Twice Too Many Churches

A COMMUNITY of rural folk of a definite population is spread out before you. Christian churches, usually from two to ten in number, are alive, if not all going concerns in the community. Whatever differences there may be in the membership rolls—and of course we shall expect many points of difference here—or in the number of services per week or per month, or in the presence

or absence of resident pastors, or in the organization of the churches into Sunday-schools, mission societies, clubs, social committees and the like—whatever the variations may be, I say, the number of persons in the community, counting every single soul, is far short of enough to man all of the churches, use any reputable standard of church organization you please to measure by.

Furthermore, in the type community in question, some or all of the churches are weak and ineffective, if not virtually down and out. Moreover,—and this is the central feature of the picture,—one church is, or several or all of these churches are, receiving subsidies in the form of money from the home-mission funds of the respective denominational state body or national body or both, the sum of money being just

EMPTY CHURCHES

enough to keep the particular church competitively in the running in that community,

The essential fact in this situation may be stated thus: In a community where there is known to be a mass of persons (in commercial parlance, "volume of business") sufficient to build and maintain only from one to five churches, there are actually found to be from two to ten; and the excess of churches over and above the number which the volume of business justifies is the direct result of the injection of home-mission money into the community.

Veiled Hate

It does not require a clever mind to know what will happen. When from two to ten kernels of corn are planted

EMPTY CHURCHES

in a piece of soil which has nutritive elements sufficient to bring only from one to five stalks to maturity, we know that a struggle for life is on which may doom one stalk, several stalks, or even all stalks. It is so with the competitive churches; but the corn simile fails to illustrate the case at the really tragic point. The subsidized churches, which make up the redundance, create in the community what is known by everybody there to be a case of veiled malignancy. Self-respecting persons either hold themselves aloof from formal religion there, or, conscience-stricken, stand helplessly bewildered, or in plain disgust they pick up and leave. And the community turns sour. The salt has lost its savor.

If you would sense the disaster of this competition, please read between

EMPTY CHURCHES

the lines of the following resolution, passed within the last year, by a minister's association in a small rural community where six Protestant churches are breathing the air that is hardly enough for three!

"Whereas we are joined together as Christain ministers in the association of brotherly fellowship and helpful co-working, we hereby agree that the following principles shall guide and control us individually, and, so far as our proper influence can go, our several congregations in our mutual relationships. . . .

I. That we decline and discourage proselytizing in any form.

II. While we recognize that every man is free to worship where and as he

EMPTY CHURCHES

wills, yet we realize that shifting from one denomination to another save from absolute religious conviction is not edifying, but harmful. Wherefore, we will not encourage those who from pique or temporary dissatisfaction with ministers or people of their own local congregations wish to unite with ours.

III. That we will not, save in exceptional cases, receive into our Sunday-schools as regular members thereof, children of families who are affiliated with other congregations of the town.

IV. That whenever we come across new-comers to the town who are affiliated with, or declare preference for, some Christian body other than our own we will not (if the church of their choice be represented by a congrega-

tion here) ask them to unite with our congregation or send their children to our Sunday-school until we have given to the minister or church officials of the church of their preference the name and address of such persons, and allowed reasonable opportunity for them to claim their own."

It is clear on the face of it that the recognized principles of Christianity have failed to keep these churches sweet to one another; and resort is, therefore, had to a contract—a perfectly human document of agreement, such as governs sinners in mundane business—in hope that an-out-and-out bargain may accomplish what Christian love can not.

These ministers agree *not* to proselytize, *not* to encourage lifting members from another church, *not* to

receive children into the Sunday-school from families of another flock, *not* to pick up new-comers without advertising them and waiting a reasonable length of time for a claimant. This document of "nots"—of things not to be done—naïvely uncovers the teasing things that were done behind curtains.

Dispensing With Mission Aid

BEFORE reading further, you will wish to know whether there is much of this sort of thing going on in rural America; whether, in fact, it is not fussing over trifles to beckon anybody to look at this thing.

The best authorities, after a long study on this subject, are quoted as estimating that the amount of Protestant home-mission money annually wasted in competitive religion in

EMPTY CHURCHES

rural communities is at present \$3,000,-
000; and if we may generalize from
twenty-five thoroughly studied coun-
ties, widely separated, where there are
211 churches aided by home-mission
money, of which 149 are disastrously
competitive, "most of the home-mission
aid which is now granted could be with-
drawn without any danger whatsoever
of leaving communities (rural) with in-
adequate facilities."

The official report goes on to say,
"Aside from any possible loss in de-
nominational prestige, which a purely
objective study such as this can not
undertake to measure, on a careful ex-
amination of all the data at hand, it
seems that 149 of the 211 aided
churches in these counties might be dis-
penssed with, to the general advantage
of the religious life in their communi-

ties and to the greater glory of the Kingdom of God."

This thing, look at it from any angle you please, is as rust on the wheat, a rot in the potato, a blight on the peach-tree, a boll-weevil in the cotton. God knows that the farmer already carries along enough of a handicap in community matters without being afflicted with this canker on his religion, as a discipline. It certainly looks like jumping on the man that's down. But this sin against the farmer is not the worst of the wicked business.

Worse Than Wasted

WHAT hurts most in this paradoxical practice is the prostitution of the most beautiful gift in all religion.

"Missions!"

The very word conjures up angels

of mercy. It brings to mind the last words of Christ to his disciples and to his followers of all time. And this mission money (it is not so pathetic that it sometimes is the widow's mite or that it is sometimes earned in feebleness with many a pain) is the purest money handled by men. It is the visible sign of tears of longing for love to govern men. Missions are the church's great romance. When out of the barrenness and weakness of my little life, I put into the hands of the church a gift for the whomsoever, in faith, I do it with a prayer that it will help bring peace to some soul, harmony to some family, blessing to some community which is beyond my power otherwise to help.

To think, then, that the tip of your prayer and mine, the sweetest thing we

can give, is poisoned, and shot into a rural community, there to hurt—Well the words, are not so much wanting to express my indignation and yours, as the mind fails to comprehend how such tactless blunders can happen.

“Why do these church bodies do this wicked thing?” you enquire.

Let the words of a high church official I once knew convey to you not so much the real reason, as the state of mind out of which the thing grows!

“So long as there is a family of our faith in that village, that family shall have the sacraments of our faith ministered to it.”

He might just as well have added, “even though the heavens fall”; for what he did was to force a subsidy into a community to help a small faction of his particular church to survive when

the majority of the people, even the majority of his own little church organization, had voted voluntarily to cut down the number of churches and eliminate the unnecessary one. The high church official just ripped open a community sore, when it had begun to heal. He poured gall in again after somebody had sweetened community life for a moment.

A New Religious Ethics Between Churches

THE egotism of a particular church group; the flaunting individualism of a particular denominational combination of persons, whose personal egos are, religiously, to be subjected, but whose combined ego is to be exalted! Here is an uncharted sea of ethics and religion between church groups. Shall

it not be discussed? Especially when it grinds the rural community to powder? Shall it be good Christianity for one Christian sect to crowd and shove just like a bully in a mob?

The day and generation is getting suspicious of pietists of all sorts who can tell sinners how to behave individually to one another; yes, who can even tell the labor group how to behave to the employer group and the employer group to the labor group, but who have no conception of what Christian principles apply as between one church group and another church group in the realm of religion, except to beat the other church group at all costs. If I were not heart and soul captured by the character, life, philosophy, and guidance of Jesus himself, if I were not thrilled by his words, and electrified by

EMPTY CHURCHES

his life and death, more and more the older I grow, I should be tempted to see in this cutthroat group egotism of competitive Christian church groups a decline of Christianity itself.

“They all do it” is a lame excuse for sinners; but for a church body, it is tragic. Think of a million people, more or less, possessing one shibboleth, trying to embody earnestly the Christ, while deliberately hamstringing another Christian church body which is doing the same thing!

But who is to blame? Whose sin is this prostitution of a holy thing?

Did you ever happen to know the officials at the head of a Protestant church body, either national or state? Did you ever know the persons who distribute home-mission money after it is once collected? Did you ever get

a glimpse of the inside? Well, if so, then you know how intensely human this situation is. You know how complex are the forces that operate, how like politics are the powers behind the locked doors. You know then that when you try to track this sinner, you can't find him. Nobody does the thing. Nobody does anything. Nobody is to blame. The Christian leaders are not leading on such matters. They are fighting the individual sins of the people.

What would America think of a great Christian leader who should come out and insist that Christian churches ought to love, respect, defer to other Christian churches? What a stir in Christendom it would make for a great man carrying his own church with him, let us say, to go up and down the land

preaching that membership in one Christian church should thereby make us members in all Christian churches; preaching that we should discount all the differences among Christian churches and love all Christian churches for their likenesses?

Look at this straw:

In Canada an outstanding movement is nearing completion to unite organically three great Protestant bodies, affecting more than three quarters of a million of church members. The daily press recently in explanation of the union, carried this item:

“The Union had its origin in the conviction that many separate churches of each denomination, especially in the rural districts, were handicapped in limited membership and

EMPTY CHURCHES

were unable to maintain properly separate buildings and ministers. It is therefore a part of a tendency in many other countries to submerge religious differences in an effort at wider and more effective service."

This looks on the horizon like the peep of dawn of a new Christian day—and what a dawn for the rural community that would be!

But—lest we be too sanguine—that dawn has some climb to make yet. Has not the Home Mission Council of the Federal Council of Churches in America put into practice on the Western frontier for several years principles of denominational courtesy? Have not the phrases of their documents on "Overchurching," "Underchurching," and "Wasteful Competition" seeped very generally throughout

EMPTY CHURCHES

the settled portions of the United States, as well as into the frontier? Have not the Foreign Mission Boards of the various denominations for years gained conspicuously the confidence of their laymen by the intelligent distribution of territory among the missions of different church bodies abroad? The fact is and must be reckoned with that all the words and phrases and ideas and logic on this subject, pro and con, have been bandied about until they are almost threadbare. The will to do, however, is still very stubborn in old, established communities.

CHAPTER VI

“**W**HAT is the difference between a state university and an ordinary university?”

A rather silly question, perhaps; but the answer that came back, lightning-like, gave me the jolt of my life, and incidentally pinked out in my mind the pattern for the community church. Here is the occasion and what took place:

A reception for the distinguished regents of the University of Wisconsin at the home of the president. In due time I found myself approaching that awful reception line, terrifying, indeed, to me, a new-comer. Suddenly I became aware that I was shaking hands with the president, whose newness to the job of presiding over a university had not entirely worn off.

It was up to me to say something, and so, after the manner of a pedagogue, I blurted out a question:

“Mr. President, will you tell me the difference between a state university and an ordinary university?”

President Van Hise did n't hesitate an instant with his answer.

“I cannot speak for all state universities,” said he, “but this university is run not for the students who happen to be here, but for the persons who may never see the university—even to the last man, woman, and child in the last community of the State.”

I had become unconscious of the reception line, for I was startled with an idea foreign to my bringing up, and I must make sure that I perfectly understood.

“Mr. President,” I interrupted, “do

you mean to say that the University of Wisconsin is not proud of turning out highly developed personalities?"

"Only as carriers," President Van Hise quickly replied, in his characteristic jerky manner; "carriers of ideas and attitudes even to the isolated community and to the unpromising man. The students who are here are here, as it were, by accident. But the university is run for Wisconsin's people at work."

I passed on down the line, and eventually out into a world strange to me, where being a "carrier" of intellectual goods to the "isolated community" and to the "last man" was an academic commonplace.

Fourteen years of that day-by-day commonplace, however, never rubbed off the beauty of its bloom for me; for here was a university running at least

EMPTY CHURCHES

neck and neck with church Christians in love for,—or duty to, if you prefer it so,—the Gospel's whomsoever.

Having seen with my own eyes these last communities of a State quickened into intellectual fervor through the devotion of university men and women, do you think I do not know what would happen to the spiritual life of these out-of-the-way communities if the supreme love of devoted church men and women were brought to bear upon them?

A Forecast Founded on Fact

I WILL venture to forecast some of the things that would happen. Every rural community would have a community church—a church for the whomsoever, even to the last man, woman, and child in that community. If

topographically possible, every such church community would stretch the bounds of its parish to include a thousand souls all told. In communities of two thousand souls, there would be two churches—two only, and both community churches. In communities of three thousand souls, there would be three community churches, and three churches only, every church, a community church; and no more churches than one to one thousand of the community population; for it takes one thousand of the population to maintain an effectual modern church; and every church is to be a Christian community church as a safeguard against paganism. But why am I so foolish as to foretell what would happen when I can tell what is happening?

There are to-day, we are told by

EMPTY CHURCHES

those who keep informed on the matter, a thousand community churches in the United States, of which the greater part are in rural territory. In fact, it is reported that new community churches are being organized at the rate, at present, of six a month. To say that there is a community church movement well-started is no exaggeration. Some States such as Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, Ohio, California, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, are outstanding in the movement.

Of course, the community church is not yet standardized, but it is shaping up. To affirm that there are three types, as some say, or five, as others put it, is more or less arbitrary. Still, for the sake of the man who understands better by types, I may say that some community churches like to be

EMPTY CHURCHES

known as having arrived at the community ideal by "federation" of two or more denominational churches, the new church preserving connection with a national church body.

Other community churches pride themselves on being "union" churches, each having originated from the organic union of two or more churches, or having been established as a "union" church in a community possessing no church, but containing families of various denominational connections in the past. The union church once formed usually stands alone, without any denominational affiliation.

Then there is the regular "denominational" church, which either just happens to be or has come purposely to be the only church in the community; and which makes the boast of existing for

EMPTY CHURCHES

the whole community rather than for its particular denominational group.

And there are other varieties, which could indeed be dignified into types, if we were pushed to it. The important thing, however, is that out of a general unrest and dissatisfaction with churches that aim to keep breeding up within themselves a highly pedigreed group of personalities which possess decidedly exclusive, if not aristocratic, characteristics, have arisen overnight, as it were, churches which admit to the inner circle all the pedigrees and aim at the democratic ideal of acting in the realm of religion for the last man, woman, and child in the community.

Churches for the Whomsoever

HERE we have before our very eyes, then, a kind of a church which is run,

EMPTY CHURCHES

as President Van Hise said his university was run, not for a select few within its walls, but for the whomsoever within its own territory; a church that views every single member as a "carrier" of the goods of life to the last man, rather than as a precious mechanism in which should be lodged all the mysteries of a peculiar cult.

Look over some of the stories of these churches which are confessedly trying to find their way to a new expression of social religion designed to prevent the wastes of competitive Christianity.

Here are the high points in an Idaho community church: Rural, in a town of 600 souls. Presbyterian by connection, but with members formerly of sixteen different denominations. Membership, 400. Plant worth \$50,-

EMPTY CHURCHES

000, with eighteen separate class-rooms for Sunday-school use. A community house, with gymnasium. Rest room for women and girls. A week-day church school using one hour a week of school time. In summer, a daily vacation Bible school. A Boy Scout troop. A Campfire Girls' organization. Potato growers and fruit men freely using the community hall. High moral standards reflecting the unity of the people.

Take another community church of farmers in Iowa, in the open country: An architecturally commanding building, providing, like a well-organized school-house, many separate rooms for religious instruction. The church has deliberately packed into its conception of "community church" the idea that, assuming Christianity to have con-

EMPTY CHURCHES

tact with every phase of living, the church has responsibility for providing the auspices under which all social activities of the community take place. What more natural, then, than that the Fourth of July celebration should be around the most beautiful spot in the community, the church? Farmers' Institute in the church? Young people having a place for good times at the church? A church committee looking after the matter of bringing good families on to farms that are for sale or rent in the community?

Take a certain community church in Indiana. Here is the story of an honest struggle on the part of four church pedigrees to burn their bridges behind them, and, pooling their resources, to start in anew. The peculiar traditions of each cult, however, cling desperately

EMPTY CHURCHES

to each group, until, after trying in vain to carry these psychological contradictions along in an artificial unity, in a moment of supreme devotion to the good of their community, they strip off their trade-marks, forget their shibboleths, and step forward into religious freedom.

The community-church movement is not going to create, I surmise, new sects, leaving a residuum of several more denominations. Rather it is a real step towards the organic union of kindred church bodies on the one hand, and so a reduction of sects; and on the other hand, a step towards democratizing every church and making it a real community church.

The Rural Dilemma and the Way Out

IT WILL require only another thousand

EMPTY CHURCHES

of these brave, venturesome community churches to turn every select-bodied denomination to looking itself over. This self-criticism will lead the great Protestant church bodies, let us hope, ✓ to a church conscience in regard to destructive church competition. Then it will be an easy step to coming to terms with one another in any locality, so as to give the community a chance to have a community church.

The community church, if we can have any faith in mankind, is sure to come along strong. If high officials become obstructionists, they will be swept away; for the people, when they once clearly see, will have their way in churches and religion as in the long run they do in government and politics.

The sooner the great Protestant bodies confess their sins of competition

EMPTY CHURCHES

and put their houses in order, the sooner the new day will come for the remote community and the last man.

Some of us know what it is to be a devotee of a great church sect. The absolute rightness of our cult has been no more questionable than our own existence. When our sect was in parallel columns with any other religious sect, we did not, could not yield right of way.

But when we are all consciously confronted with the problem of working out the religious life of 30,000,000 of isolated farm people, we wake up to the fact that we occupy a position where cult pride, cult individualism, and cult exclusiveness break down. Then we find ourselves in a dilemma; we must leave the farmers to rot, a thing which is unquestionably abhor-

EMPTY CHURCHES

rent to our cult; or we must modify our cult, a thing which on the surface seems a sacrilege to do.

But there is a way out of every dilemma; generally, however at the cost of a bit of human pride. The community church shows the various noble church cults one way out of the rural church dilemma.

Read these bold words from a group of fifty young Methodist rural workers penned to bishops:

“To the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church: We the undersigned members of the Methodist Episcopal Church appeal to you to give prayerful consideration to the following suggestions:

1. That the bishops, district superintendents, and other administrative officers of our denomination cordially

EMPTY CHURCHES

coöperate with the leaders of other denominations in an effort to so organize rural church geographical units that not more than one Protestant church to every one thousand population shall prevail as a standard.

2. That service to the community rather than to the denomination be the basis on which ministers shall be trained, appointed, and promoted.

3. That the Methodist Episcopal Church take the lead in the give-and-take method with other denominations, even to the extent of encouraging the discontinuance of small, struggling, competing Methodist churches in the interest of rural Christian service to the communities involved.

4. That zeal for service to the entire

EMPTY CHURCHES

community and a sympathetic consideration for those whose background and training are non-Methodist shall characterize the efforts of the Methodist Episcopal Church wherever it alone occupies a rural field.

5. That the conference membership of a Methodist Episcopal minister shall not be jeopardized by appointment as pastor of a federated or undenominational church where such a church is required for the largest service to the community."

Theological students and college students are not to be outdone by their elders in bravery. Read the following document for circulation among the officials of the various church bodies—a document which sounds like the "first call" for the rural community church:

EMPTY CHURCHES

“We the rural college student delegates at the American Country Life Association Student Conference believe that the minister who serves in a church which has no right to exist loses respect for his profession and can not do outstanding work; we believe that our denominational boards which appropriate money we give to keep churches going in overchurched communities and which send leadership into such communities are only making people feel that the ideals of Christianity are no higher than those of pagan religions. We would apply the principles and teachings of Jesus Christ. Therefore we recommend:

1. That students preparing to enter the rural ministry refuse to serve charges in overchurched communities.

EMPTY CHURCHES

2. That we, as rural students, do all in our power in our communities and in places of leadership that we may attain to prevent denominational church boards from pouring money and leadership into communities, which is to be used to perpetuate denominational strife that is destroying the religious life of our communities.

3. That we pledge ourselves to endeavor to substitute the principles and teachings of Jesus Christ for narrow denominational creeds and doctrines. In view of this, we shall try to obtain an atmosphere and physical equipment of rural churches, as well as church services themselves, that shall be designed to meet the physical, social, mental, and spiritual needs of the people who worship there, regardless of their denominations."

The press carries the story that down in Georgia five hundred farmers last season dedicated an acre of land apiece, with all it grew, to the Lord. These pieces of land are spoken of generally in Georgia as the "Lord's Acres," and the "Lord's Acre Plan" is hailed as a hundred per cent. way to finance the country church.

The story goes on to say:

"Farmers in the South are firmly convinced that the Lord's Acre yields better crops than surrounding land, and that the entire farm of the one giving the acre is more productive than those of his neighbors."

The Community Church as a Democracy

THE community church strikes me as a Lord's Acre in rural Christendom

bearing a crop dedicated to God. And, if I read the returns aright, the comparative yield justifies the belief. It is a church of the people—a democracy in very truth. Any subtle influence that would tend to wash in upon this democracy and wear it down to a dominating set of people or to a group of negligible folk or to a loose aggregation of nondescripts must be walled off with reinforced concrete.

A single type of religious temperament will not govern the range and character of the community church. A constant sort of ideals that appeals only to the seraphic souls or to other minds only in moments of exalted pitch will, by a natural process of elimination, soon reduce the church to a temperamental sect. No, the church is made up of all temperaments the matter-of-

fact, active, and practical; the poetic, sentimental, imaginative; the strenuous; the easy-going; the enthusiastic; the petty; the anxious; the generous, self-denying; the jolly, optimistic; the gloomy, conservative; the militant, crusading; the important; the retiring. Their interests, too—the interests of the whole church are as broad and various as human nature.

A cross-section of Christianity will reveal a ten-thousand fold variegation of human streak and human color wherever religion has filtered into actual life. This meeting-ground of all the higher interests of the community will, therefore, be home for each interest. As no single type of temperament should repulse the others and shrink the church, so no single activity of the church should monopolize the focus of

EMPTY CHURCHES

attention. The mission interest, the Bible interest, the educational interest, the interests social, musical, ceremonial, disciplinary, the evangelistic interest, the civic and industrial interest, the financial interest, the idealistic interest, both personal and social—all these and the rest will have good footing in the community church.

A church which should undertake to be a democracy in fact would find that there is only one way of “maintaining interest” enough actually to keep bringing the people together. This way is sounding God’s summons to keep going the redemption of its community at every point. The summons to definite undertakings to improve community life is like the summons to a pioneer homesteader to make a home fit for his family. He gears his hands to ax and

saw, to plow and hammer, and he knows that he can change the wilderness.

Besides stereotyped church procedure, a steady look at living conditions in the community, with the determined expectation of changing these conditions for the better; a look for the moral clues to whole wretched situations; a look to disentangle from the chaotic mass single, great, unmistakable moral issues—these steady looks, under God's summons, must be given anew in every generation to the kaleidoscopic facts of human life.

The church that shall go into the business of becoming self-conscious and of realizing its democracy will hear God's summons to community redemption and begin to re-scale the map of church importance and usefulness in the community on heroic lines.

[illegible]

BV

652

G178

55168

AUTHOR

Galpin, C. J.

TITLE

Empty churches

DATE
LOANED

BORROWER'S NAME

9/16/35

Olson

6-15-38

Presbyterian College of Christ

Rosen

7/10/39 R

5-10-47

8-9-50

2/58



C0-ACD-923